

Villages Veterans appreciate benefits VA system provides

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THE VILLAGES - Special events will be held throughout the year that began Thursday, in observance of the 75th anniversary of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Tri-county area veterans are just happy that the VA has been, and continues to be, there for them, providing health services and benefits.

Retired Air Force Lt. Col. Harold Sievers, who helps drive vets to the VA hospital in Gainesville, said the hospital was already celebrating with a healthy dose of red, white and blue, displaying flags in various locations around the facility.

"I think it's one of the greatest, and it has improved over the years," Sievers said. "They are needed."

Dallace Meehan, also a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel, said he hasn't taken advantage of VA services, but he has referred friends to the program.

"I have used the VA for a number of friends of mine," he said.

Meehan said his friend, Paul Schilling, was exposed to Agent Orange and goes to a VA hospital all the time.

"It's fortunate our veterans in The Villages have access to it," Meehan said.

Schilling, a disabled Army veteran, said if you need the VA's help, they give it.

"They've treated me square," he said.

Charlie Gray, another Air Force vet, has used VA services and said the health care is excellent.

"Once you get in the system, the care is great," Gray said.

Vivian Chiasson, an Air Force veteran and president of Tri-County Women Veterans in The Villages, also has been enrolled in the VA program. She said none of her fellow female veterans complain about the care they receive from VA.

"We wanted to get in to have it when we need it," she said. "I think they're great."

Mary Kay Hollingsworth, a VA public affairs officer, said there is no telling what special celebrations they could have, and VA employees are already being asked for suggestions. She said Veterans Day will bring special services this year, and that is only the beginning.

"As we move through the year," Hollingsworth said, "we will be beefing up our celebrations."